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[illegible]

T·L·S
THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

FRIDAY • 19 NOVEMBER 1976 • No 3.897 • 20p

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BODLEY HEAD

TLS Commentary



Vercingétorix and All That

The French publishers Larousse appear to be proud of their initiative in launching their *Histoire de France* on *bandes dessinées*, a cartoon-strip history of France, in monthly parts. Starting with Vercingétorix and Roman Gaul, in nine months' time the series will have reached Joan of Arc, in twelve months it will be dealing with Louis XIII and Richelieu. Aimed at children between the ages of eight and fifteen, of whom a public opinion poll records that 85 per cent are readers of strip cartoons, but among whom only 25 per cent have any enthusiasm for history, it is claimed that this method will be a breakthrough in history teaching. Every scene is being taken care of, the scenes and "accessories" are accurate, and each number will be accompanied by a pedagogical leaflet. Two pronouncements are particularly interesting: first, that it is necessary to rid the study of the past of its nineteenth-century vision and to endow it with the achievements of contemporary historical science; and secondly, that Larousse hopes to attract not only people who are interested in history (adults as well as children) but also those who are simply amused by the cartoon and the comic strip.

The possibilities of conveying information by means of cartoon-strip drawings are said to be endless. The French Communist Party, always concerned with the cultural education of its members, used to treat the readers of *Picasso*, a cartoon version of *Jeune*, as a historical costume is a natural for the skilful artist and an easy option for the writer who does not dare present a serialised version of Scott's text. But can the comic-strip Larousse be considered a serious venture in the teaching of history to young people, a way of conveying

to them some notion of how modern historians view the past? One has visions of an English history series in which Henry VIII's secretary, Thomas Cromwell, is observed by a courier (possibly resembling Professor Elton) and a noble emerging from his board says "the most remarkable revolutionary in English history"; or an early nineteenth-century handloom weaver (possibly resembling E. P. Thompson) remarks "It is an over-simplification to ascribe our debasement to the power-loom."

But the French series is more simple and more direct. The captions invite us to enter into the simple and peaceful life of the Gauls while the drawings show us the inhabitants at work and at play (eating, and drinking). It is here that we are told of the controversy as to whether Gauls and Celts were one and the same, but war and conquest dominate the scene. We are shown a baby, in fact rather advanced in years given the date, and his parents announce that they will receive a son. We are also shown a Gaul, with his friends because he is still weeping for the death of his father. This is Vercingétorix. Then the Gauls, somewhat bull-necked Caesar, tells his soldier-looking daughter that he will receive a son. Rome only when he has won his laurels in Gaul. After this it is battle after battle with muscular soldiers (the Romans often seem to have the advantage) and the Gauls, who are so dramatic in their actions, can only be expressed in captions in the heaviest text. **ATTACQUE! ATTACQUE! ATTACQUE!** There is an occasional "Vercingétorix" moment, as when Caesar, hand to chin, watched by

their apprenticeship to Parliamentary institutions. The picture he draws from personal observation of the Indian National Assembly is not meant to be a caricature, though he is not blind to the Indian majority's present lack of judgment and indeed he refuses his mood of praise to the ability with which many of the British officials have adapted themselves to a new regime which has brought them into close touch with Indian opinion but also requires from them a far more active role in the country. As administrators their position may be compared to that of British officials in India, or in the Government of India, or in the Provincial Councils, they are expected to practise all the arts of the expert Parliamentarian. The personnel in any case is inadequate for these two-fold activities, which lead to Parliamentary life an experience of even greater unreality than must necessarily exist in the absence of Cabinet responsibility. As to the recrudescence of Hindu-Muslim feuds, how much more surprising, though he complains rather surprisingly, that he received any satisfactory explanation of this deplorable phenomenon. Do they not largely represent a violent reaction from the brief spasm of artificial "non-cooperation" induced by Gandhi during the most hectic days of the "Non-cooperation" movement, of seeing the bottom knocked out of the Khalifa agitation by the Turkish nationalist whom they had worshipped from afar as the living

word of Islam?



two helmeted soldiers, reflects "Ce Vercingétorix m'intrigue". But the emphasis is on action and conflict (though always bloodless).

This is the weakness of the method, however well-intentioned and careful. The Romans could be told in the last war. Pictorial history has a sameness about it, and films about twentieth-century history too often consist of shots of soldiers marching in the rain or of commuters emerging from a tube station. It is as if the particularly of history can only be conveyed in words, whether spoken or printed. But amateurs of the cartoon strip will be entertained by the way in which the high quality of this production, and they will hardly care about its shortcomings as a form of teaching history.

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DUCKWORTH

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A press of Sisters

The Stanbrook Abbey Press has its first line of type—a canonisation of its future work—hundred years ago this month on equipment costing a total of £32 8s. Though they resorted to the old Canon machine, this makes them the oldest surviving little press in the country, and this is commemorated in an exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum (until Feb 13) which lovingly illustrates the Benedictine Sisters' labours and the help and advice they have received from many eminent quarters, notably Emery Walker, Robert Gibbins, Sir Sydney Cockerell, and above all the last typographer Jan Van Kesteren who created the Canon type for them in 1874.

This handsome, if slightly precious, face, rich in spirit and elegant, joined the Stanbrook Abbey Press in 1874, and their earlier production, *Amaze*, these the exhibition includes a printing of "The edition of 600 copies for the monks" of *Maximus Desideratus*, that uplifting place now appears everywhere, and that a seventeenth-century book connoisseur. There is also an elaborate *Rituelle* of 1893 is an edition limited to twenty copies, richly textured. Silurian paper from John Mason's twelve-page press, my shirt tore so I put the "top" on, and the proof of *Sansoni's Path to Peace* with the poet's comments ("as St. Fulbertus may have told you, I had a key significance in the progress of my submission").

Some exhibits, however, seem relevant only by virtue of some mislabeled captions: "there is a lesson to be learned from study of the Ashendene Press, which was a danger in following them too closely. In particular this book, *Sublucio* type would prove an apt crucible must." One pleasure of a school history of the press, with more misprints and misinformation per square inch than would seem possible, which described the routine, "any deviation from perfection was ruthlessly corrected by fasting, disciplines, and waiting up." The caption points out that it "breathes the spirit of bubbling joy which is a natural part of cloister life, to the illogical, and a note goes, there is nothing out about the sheer effort that has been freely and rewardingly expended. In the spirit of the press's founder, Father Shepherd, a simple condition of the press is a quiet life, pour Dieu, on restait paraitement."

From this point the guidelines to Slim's future development, as a person of many and varied interests, are clearly seen; he was not only the dedicated soldier he became when he joined the OTC in 1912. After two years of teaching he began work as a clerk at Stewarts and Lloyds, and would then have joined the Asiatic Petroleum Company but for the outbreak of war in 1914 and the start of his military career. The author tells us how Slim soon found he was a natural writer and that a soldier's life positively helped him to exploit his literary bent. Every year during the 1930s stories by Anthony Mills (the pen-name he adopted) appeared regularly in the *Evening News*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Sketch*, and in *Blackwoods* and *Chambers* magazines. Later he edited the United Services Institute Journal at Slim's; and this was in addition to the writing of *Unofficial History*, published between the wars, and *Defeat Into Victory*, which was a collection of the great military leaders of our time have had a comparable writing career. Strangely, only his wife Aileen and Philip Pratt, who had been at school with Slim and remained his life-long friend, knew of this achievement until the Second World War began. It was all part and parcel of Slim's accep-

BIOGRAPHY

RONALD LEWIN: Slim, the Standard Bearer 350pp. Leo Cooper. £7.50.

It is over thirty years since the end of the Second World War. Looking back at those six years of battles and campaigns, in which British and Commonwealth armies were heavily engaged, it will not be surprising if future historians name three men as the outstanding field commanders: Field Marshals Alexander, Montgomery and Slim. They will be numbered with the men who made victory, because, at the end, the most decisive they fought and won were decisive, resulting in total surrender of their opponents' armies. Of course Auchinleck, Wavell and others also won great victories but their results were not decisive. A few years ago, when Slim's name was being biographed, but in Slim's case the vital material—his own personal papers and family records covering the whole of his varied life story—was not available to previous writers.

Now at last we have a complete biography of William Slim, a distinguished author and military historian, who not only had access to the field marshal's papers, but was also advised and assisted by many people with unrivalled knowledge of their subject, headed by Admiral of the Fleet Sir John Dill, the Mountbatten of Burma. The result is a work which tells us as much about the human side of Slim—his character and approach to life and to his fellow men, including the influence of his happy marriage to Priscilla, as it does about his military achievements. There is also an elaborate *Rituelle* of 1893 is an edition limited to twenty copies, richly textured. Silurian paper from John Mason's twelve-page press, my shirt tore so I put the "top" on, and the proof of *Sansoni's Path to Peace* with the poet's comments ("as St. Fulbertus may have told you, I had a key significance in the progress of my submission").

Slim's family background was an unusual one for regular army officers of his generation who served in both world wars. Born in 1891, he spent most of his youth and all his school days in Birmingham, where his father had a small but not very successful wholesale metal business. He was educated first at a Roman Catholic grammar school and then at King Edward's School, where his educational standard was very high. English was his best subject and poverty (at the age of sixteen) his lot; so, driven by necessity, he became an elementary school teacher at a poor school in Birmingham. Here is Mr. Lewin's assessment of the lasting effect this experience had on a future field marshal:

It was said of Slim, when he became Chief of the Imperial General Staff, that he had the inestimable benefit of having forgotten "the smell of a soldier's feet". That ingrained understanding of the ordinary Other Rank, his psychology, his hopes and fears, which was worth more than divisions when he came to fight the Japanese, had roots stretching far back to a crude classroom in a Birmingham slum, where victory consisted in ending the day without disaster.

From this point the guidelines to Slim's future development, as a person of many and varied interests, are clearly seen; he was not only the dedicated soldier he became when he joined the OTC in 1912. After two years of teaching he began work as a clerk at Stewarts and Lloyds, and would then have joined the Asiatic Petroleum Company but for the outbreak of war in 1914 and the start of his military career. The author tells us how Slim soon found he was a natural writer and that a soldier's life positively helped him to exploit his literary bent. Every year during the 1930s stories by Anthony Mills (the pen-name he adopted) appeared regularly in the *Evening News*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Sketch*, and in *Blackwoods* and *Chambers* magazines. Later he edited the United Services Institute Journal at Slim's; and this was in addition to the writing of *Unofficial History*, published between the wars, and *Defeat Into Victory*, which was a collection of the great military leaders of our time have had a comparable writing career. Strangely, only his wife Aileen and Philip Pratt, who had been at school with Slim and remained his life-long friend, knew of this achievement until the Second World War began. It was all part and parcel of Slim's accep-

tion of Slim's accep-

The victor of Burma

By Brian Montgomery



"The spirit of the 14th Army"—from the book reviewed here.

donal modesty, with its related virtues of tact and tolerance, which he exercised without the slightest loss of determination and energy. Mr. Lewin writes of his "inability to set the same high valuation on himself as others did."

His spontaneous and outgoing nature drew men to him and held them by the affection and admiration he aroused. Slim's other "liney" could have so impressed that notorious American, General Stilwell ("Vinegar Joe"), whose pastime was anglophobia, that he volunteered to serve under Slim in Southeast Asia.

Equally important in Slim was his deep yet very simple, religious belief; brought up by his fervently Roman Catholic mother he nevertheless found it impossible to accept the dogma of the Roman Church but retained a basic Christian faith, and found no religious difficulty in his marriage to Aileen, a Scottish Presbyterian. One of his oldest friends, a Presbyterian chaplain (Donald MacDonald), wrote to the author:

When Slim was GOC 14th Army, and I was a Senior Chaplain, I was frequently at his HQ. On one occasion when our mutual friend Punch Cowan was battling for Meiktila, with his 17 Div Bill turned to me, saying: "Now, Donald, get your chest to pray first and for this victory." The phrase *flat out* has lived in my memory—so different from rubric language!

Mr. Lewin will greatly interest many of his readers by the way in which he has drawn frequent comparisons between Slim and his brother Field Marshal Montgomery. Having already published a biography of "Monty", Mr. Lewin is clearly well qualified to do this, though as one who has served under both commanders, and also written my brother's life story, I believe perceptive readers will not entirely agree with all that the author has said in this context. In discussing Slim's religious life he writes: "Nor, for that matter, he (Slim) made Montgomery's mistake of suggesting that he and God were a Private Company." Again, in a reference to Slim's policy of "not bringing with him to a new appointment his own group of personal staff officers, but rather the work of someone less personally involved."

Such things apart, there were some remarkable similarities in the careers of these two commanders. Both, as young men, joined the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, both were twice wounded in the First World War and very nearly died. Montgomery's grave was dug from his severe wounds in the Gallipoli battles; he had to be evacuated to a hospital in England. Slim, on the other hand, was wounded in the Second World War, but was very nearly saved by his superior commander (Slim was actually told his war was over, but he was relieved of his com-

14th Army to total victory over the Japanese.

From the chaos at Shweboin Burmese managed to rescue 30 Jeeps and 50 trucks (28 guns of various type also reached India). For the majority, therefore, the final stage of their 1,000 mile adventure had still to be covered on foot. By the time Imphal was reached, 17th Division had hundreds of men going sick each day with malaria and dysentery. Sanitation was impossible; the smell of death and excrement was everywhere. Men marched barefoot and clad in rags. It was a symbol of the strain which he was enduring on behalf of all his command that when Slim tried to grow a beard, the bristles emerged a pure white. The total casualties, killed wounded and missing, were 13,000.

It was after the great retreat, which had ended at Imphal, that Slim, now commanding 15 Corps at Ranchi, was very nearly sacked by his army commander, that extraordinary man the late General Irwin. The author shows us now the latter appeared determined to ignore Slim and rely on his knowledge of and experience in fighting the Japanese. When the first ill-fated Arakan offensive, mounted by Irwin, went very wrong, the latter merely reinforced failure by increasing General Lloyd's 14th Division to nine brigades without calling in Slim and his experienced Corps HQ. As matters grew worse Irwin sacked Lloyd and then sent Slim to replace the exhausted Arakan Brigade—which he did successfully. There was an ironic sequel as Mr. Lewin describes. Irwin, severely critical of Slim's conduct of the battle, sent the latter a signal telling him he would be relieved of his command. Slim's remark on reading this signal is worth quoting: "I suppose I'm sacked. I shall join the Home Guard in England. I wonder if I shall find Irwin there." Then chance once again intervened. Irwin, not Slim, was dismissed and the former sent a dispatch to Slim: "You're not sacked, I am."

The clash with Irwin, and its threat, was important in Slim's life story for it led to his appointment as Army Commander in the same month that Mountbatten arrived as Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Southeast Asia. We learn in this book how very much Slim owed to the powerful aid and support of Mountbatten, without whose influence at the highest levels, particularly with the Americans, 14th Army would never have been given essential logistic resources including, above all, the massive air lift. The author then takes us in detail through the next two years of bitter and savage fighting in the mountains and jungles of the Indo-Burmese frontier, and the Caribbean with the West India Regiment, which he had in fact requested. In England, recovering from his severe wounds in the Gallipoli battles, he had to be evacuated to a hospital in England. Slim, on the other hand, was wounded in the Second World War, but was very nearly saved by his superior commander (Slim was actually told his war was over, but he was relieved of his com-

Many readers of this book will recognize the famous commanders and staff officers who, as it were, march across its pages with their great leader, from the days of retreat to his final victory: men like Taffy Davies, Welchman the Gunner, Hasted the Supply Officer, the administrative genius, Brigadier Frank Messervy, Briggs, Peter Rees; with Gurkhas such as Scoones, Gracey, Bruce Scott, and the incomparable Punch Cowan of the 17th (Black Cat) Division, and many others. One who, like Brigadier Wingate, of Chindit fame, did Slim have trouble, and the author quotes Slim's final verdict on that unrepentant brigadier, who tried to impose demands on his Army Commander, "Wingate was deliberately

ETYMOLOGICAL DICTIONARIES

A Tentative Typology

YAKOV MALKIEL

Etymological knowledge of hundreds of the world's languages is embedded in thousands of dictionaries of varying purpose and merit. This book offers researchers a systematic evaluation of the information available in many of these dictionaries and an analysis of the methods and theoretical pre-suppositions employed by lexicographers. Beginning with the seventeenth-century work "Etymologiae" by Isidore of Seville and continuing through to late twentieth-century examples of etymological dictionaries, Professor Malkiel argues that examination of how previous lexicographers organised and illustrated their material not only illuminates earlier scholarship, but aids the preparation of future etymological dictionaries. The study also provides a most comprehensive annotated bibliography of etymological dictionaries. Published October, £11.25.

DEFINING A LINGUISTIC AREA South Asia

COLIN P. MABICA

Although the existence of linguistic areas—geographical zones where otherwise unrelated languages converge and have come to exhibit common characteristics—has long been known, these phenomena have not hitherto been subjected to either careful analysis or comprehensive description. In this book Mabica studies the problem of territorially delineating the South Asian linguistic area, roughly India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Nepal and Bangladesh. He establishes morphological and syntactic criteria for this purpose; he sifts and collates existing descriptive information and explores the distribution of certain ostensible characteristics of the Indian area in languages of Eurasia and parts of Africa. He demonstrates that these linguistic traits form an area pattern and that the South Asian area can be defined in terms of their distribution. The methodological problems involved in organising a comparative study of linguistic areas are analysed and linguistic characteristics of general typological interest and importance (not simply local oddities) are suggested. In addition, the author develops a theory by which to fix empirically the boundaries of any proposed linguistic area. Published May, £12.00.

ARGUMENTS FOR A NON-TRANSFORMATIONAL GRAMMAR

RICHARD A. HUDSON

For the past decade the dominant transformational theory of syntax has produced the most interesting insights into syntactic properties. At the same time another theory, systematic grammar, has been developed very quietly as an alternative to the transformational model.

In this provocative work the author outlines a "daughter-dependency theory" which is derived from systematic grammar and offers empirical reasons for preferring it to any version of transformational grammar. Hudson's strong arguments for a non-transformational grammar stress the capacity of daughter-dependency theory to reflect the facts of language structure and to capture generalisations that transformational models miss. An important attraction of the theory is that the syntax is more concrete, with the abstract underlying elements. To be published shortly.

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50. الفلاح

As Otto von Falke has shown, some of the very rich repertoire of textile designs found in the Reichsarchiv manuscripts can be paralleled in Byzantine, Islamic, Persian and Sassanid silks that are still extant. These were fabrics known to have come from or through Byzantium and "Arabs" when writing of the reign of Henry IV's William of Poitiers spoke of art treasures that would delight even of a Byzantine or Arab.

Irish academic teaching has limitations as several contributors hint. Eystyn Evans even claims the "contemporary academic establishment" for their "lack of interest in folk-studies, but in the modern world certainly, within the past fifty years, when the great academic interest in what was popular must depend upon a vigorous housekeeping by ethno-linguists themselves. The ethnologist like every scholar in a large uncharted field must travel with little baggage and a good compass. Otherwise, he may wander aimlessly and never find the place he is to reach of other scholars have not experienced the temptation and in consequence, have succumbed to the allurement of the archaic."

